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ABSTRACT

This document discusses significant differences between the cultural personalities and communication patterns of non-mainstream and mainstream groups in an effort to understand the nature and cause of conflict between groups. The author seeks to identify the "combustible" features of different communication systems, to demonstrate the systematic nature of the features as they operate within their respective "natural" cultural settings by showing how they interrelate with other aspects of the communication process, and to show the extent to which these features can be "accounted for" in terms of general or specific (ethnic) cultural factors. (Author/VM)

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Mainstream and Non-mainstream Communication Norms

Thomas Kochman*

Marshall McLuhan has written, "The English can never remember and the Irish can never forget. That observation neatly defines the differences between a society predominantly literary and one that is mostly oral."[1] In a previous paper[2] reference was made to notions of "literacy" and "orality," but within the context of a meeting between university faculty and community residents, and then not with respect to retention of "memory", but as having defined respectively different modes of communication, as well as different norms for what constituted a "meaningful dialogue."

The reader may well wonder at this time how such seemingly disparate things as memory and modes of communication, as well as others yet to be mentioned, can be "related", that is, defined by the same cultural reality: the field of the spoken and/or printed word, as well as how these media respectively, are in large part, ultimately responsible for creating different communication systems with different and often opposite sets of expectations and requirements for what constitutes "effective communication" within that system, requirements that users of the "other" cultural system

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[1]McLuhan, Marshall, Counter-Blast, Harcourt, Brace & World, New York, 1969, p. 71.

[2]"Philosophical Construct", unpublished, summer 1971. This paper and the one published here in this volume were originally intended to be chapters for a forthcoming publication entitled "Communication Goals for the Urban Teacher".

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do not satisfy in cross-cultural interaction, which results in negative feedback and eventual conflict.

In consideration of this fact, and operating under the notion that understanding the nature and cause of conflict is a prerequisite to resolving it, the ensuing discussion proposes to accomplish the following:

1. identify the "combustible" features of the respective communication systems of mainstream and non-mainstream people, i.e., those "differences" which respective members of each group will tend to assign opposite meaning and value, and,

2. demonstrate the <u>systematic</u> nature of these features as they operate within their respective "natural" cultural setting by showing how they inter-relate with other aspects of the communication process: channel, mode, function, etc.,

3. show the extent to which these features can be "accounted for" in terms of general or specific (ethnic!) cultural factors.

That is to say, some of the "different" communication norms of mainstream and non-mainstream people can be attributed to their having been processed through the respectively different enculturating structures of predominantly oral and literary societies. Since <u>all</u> societies are oral or literary or both in varying degrees, these characteristics can be considered <u>general</u> in nature, i.e., not restricted to a specific ethnic group. So McLuhan's statement about the English and the Irish would be an equally apt characterization of mainstream and non-mainstream Americans here, e.g., "Whites can never remember what _____(Blacks, American Indians, etc.) can never forget," Blacks with respect to the

reality that was slavery, American Indians with respect to the reality of the land being once theirs and having been taken from them, or in the process of being taken from them now because mainstream governments do not feel that past land treaties are presently binding upon them.

On the other hand, there are also communication norms that are characteristic of ethnicity, i.e., shared within, but not across, ethnic boundaries and should be viewed as specific to an ethnic group. For example, the norms surrounding Black verbal play or musical expression which, to "account for", would entail an examination of the Black cultural aesthetic specifically. As the cultural norms governing "good" communication can have several origins, consideration of their source, and whether they are shared among all non-mainstream people, by virtue of their common orality for example, or are characteristic of specific ethnic minorities (Blacks, Puerto Ricans, etc.) is important to identify. Our presentation will consider first the general cultural features that distinguish non-mainstream from mainstream people, those which relate to cross-cultural communication between the two groups, and then consider communication norms characteristic of specific ethnic groups.

The purpose of "accounting" for different communication features in terms of the cultural field that defined them, and of showing their systematic nature within the group that habitually uses them, instead of just identifying them, is to enlarge in the reader two notions, that of "cause and effect" ("historical" legitimacy) and of "structure" (rule-governed behavior), each of which, in turn, is designed to promote or reinforce the single idea of the equality of

cultural systems, an important and necessary respect to obtain if any meaningful and lasting reconciliation of those "combustible" communication features, those that presently interfere with effective cross-cultural communication, is to occur. Note also, that we are not prescribing the form that "reconciliation" (reciprocity in communication) is to take; that would be both premature and presumptuous as we feel that that will have to be worked out in the actual "give and take" of communication between the various groups in contact as mentioned in the first chapter. Yet we do feel confident that the reconciliation, whether in the form of a compromise, or of a mutual respect of cultural systems otherwise left intact, will be with reference to the communication norms discussed here.

Memory in Oral and Literary Societies

The "message" or "meaning" of any new medium, as McLuhan tells us, is the "change of scale or pace pattern that it introduces into human affairs."[3] Measured in terms of its impact, the message becomes the sum total of those "psychic and social effects" which occur, directly or indirectly, as a consequence of the medium's arrival upon the scene.

So the introduction of the automobile, for example, created on the social level highways, filling stations, shopping centers, suburbia, sundry types of employment, etc., and, on a more profound psychic level, among other things, an expanded consciousness of the world, and perhaps, the need to "keep moving." So oral and

[3]McLuhan, Marshall, Understanding Media: The Extensions of Man, New York: New American Library (Signet), 1964, p. 24.

literary societies also create an inter-related (ecological!) field.

The introduction of literacy, for example, profoundly changed man's relationship to the outside world and his conception of the past in which memory played a vital role. From what changed as result of the introduction of the new medium: literacy, we can infer to what extent man's relationship to the world was shaped by the earlier defining medium of orality. To begin with, we note that oral societies are also traditional, by which is meant that the past is always part of the psychological reality of the present, which is to say that a knowledge and feeling about the past is continually made present by means of narrative, which in turn, revives and re-inforces our memory of it. Also, because of this continuity, the present is always interpreted with reference to the past, which is another way of saying that the past is perpetually exerting its definition on the present. To "live in the past" might be the disparaging comment that non-traditional people make about traditional societies. But, traditional people would more likely say not that they "live in the past," but rather, that the "past lives in the present."

On the other hand, once the past became "anchored" in print, the role of memory as record-keeper of it, and as store-house for what was known, became largely displaced. One of the psychic effects of a society that is predominantly literary is that people are permitted to forget, which is a luxury that oral people feel they cannot afford. As Walter Ong has noted,

> Oral-aural man does not like the non-traditional because, beyond his limited means of control, it advertises the tenuousness of his hold on actuality. Only when record-keeping, first by chirography and then much more

> effectively by print, anchored knowledge in space for facile visual retrieval could traditionalism yield to a more flexible relationship to the world and a more flexible understanding of what the world is."[4]

As memory has a respectively different function in oral and literary societies, it should not be surprising that the content of the memory of oral and literary man, especially with respect to the distant past, should also have a respectively different scope and texture; nor should it be surprising that contemporary issues, based upon a knowledge and feeling of the past, should be viewed differently by those oral-traditional people (non-mainstream) whose recollection of the past is vivid, "as if it were yesterday," and by those literate "flexible" people (mainstream) for whom the distant past "no longer exists" and therefore for whom it has no compelling, let alone binding, directive force. We have already alluded to this with respect to "land and peace treaties" made by past American governments with American Indians, which present American governments feel they are not "honor bound" to respect. Another contemporary example is the Blacks' request for "reparations" payments for the condition of slavery and subsequent servitude for which no or little recompense by American society was given. Apart from the consideration of whether reparations was an "appropriate" form of indemnification--it could be pointed out that German governments since 1948 have been giving reparations payments as a form of indemnification to those surviving German Jews who were forced to flee Nazi Germany to escape genocide--most mainstream Americans viewed the Black request for indemnification in whatever form as "absurd",

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[4]Walter J. Ong, S.J., "World as View and World as Event," American Anthropologist, August, 1969.

primarily because they felt no responsiblity for the past that Blacks were referring to.[5] They felt no responsibility because they had no recollection of it, attributable in part to their being non-oral traditional. Memory, after all, is the necessary stimulus for promoting feelings of guilt over past crimes, which in turn is allegedly supposed to create a "sense of responsiblity" for the redress of grievances resulting from them. Yet it is impossible to feel guilty over that which one cannot remember.

Blacks, on the other hand, being oral and traditional, have a most vivid recollection of the past. Contemporary Black American families, it must be noted, often have grandmothers living within the central family unit, many of whose grandmothers were themselves slaves, and who, through the oral narrative process, have made their children and children's children over succeeding generations aware of what slavery was all about, sufficient to make many contemporary Blacks angry about it, yet an anger whose "distant" stimulus contemporary mainstream whites just could not relate to and for which reason they regarded the Black claim as <u>invalid</u>. From this discussion it ought to be clear the vital role that memory plays in contemporary communication between non-mainstream and mainstream people, as well as how its different content and scope is largely determined

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[5]Not availing themselves of the "facile visual retrieval" that Ong has mentioned print as providing, not to mention the fact that the recorded information about slavery would hardly reflect the Black perspective, but rather that of the group to which the recorder belonged. With respect to the first point, it is important to note that print can be ignored, but sound cannot, a significant factor affecting the content of memory, and convenient for those who wish to avoid knowing about the past or even different aspects of the present. For a discussion of the second point see under "bias" below.

by the structures developed within an oral and/or literary society.

"Combustible" Ingredients: Interference of Cultural Communication Systems.

When we spoke earlier of the meeting between community residents and university faculty we made reference to certain denigrating statements made by the white university faculty over the communicative behavior manifested by the community residents, one which they regarded as not meeting their requirements for what they felt constituted "rational discussion." The community residents were likewise disappointed by the failure of the white university faculty to express their interest and support of community participation in the framing of an urban education program in which the latter were to be the prime beneficiaries, with anything resembling "honest conviction." It was clear to us as participant-observers at this meeting, and at others that we have attended in the past involving mainstream and non-mainstream people, that members of each cultural group, when acting according to their respective communication norms, are robbing members of the "other" cultural group of the cues the others rely upon to satisfy themselves that effective communication is taking place.

The "combustible" features in the process of communication as demonstrated in the above context and others like it are, for mainstream people, the introduction, by non-mainstream people, of an outward show of feeling and its concomitant "cousin" loudness, and the establishment of a mode of confrontation, or dynamic opposition. Conversely, the "combustible" features for non-mainstream people

are the absence of any outward show of feeling (and therefore also loudness) by mainstream people and their avoidance of a mode of dynamic opposition, insisting instead on a climate of "calm", and a mode of cooperation.

As each group has, at various times, assumed the "other's" mode and exhibited the "other's" features, it cannot be generally said that each regards them as "strange" in and of themselves; rather, when they use the "other" mode they are pursuing a goal that each perceives to be substantially different from the one that is alleged to be the "objective" of their meeting, namely, "resolving disagreement." For example, mainstream people also publicly show feelings, get loud and establish dynamic opposition, but typically to what end? Non-mainstream people also publicly suppress feeling and avoid dynamic opposition, but typically, with what objective?

Therefore, it is generally not the particular feature or mode in and of itself that necessarily produces "misunderstanding", but the pattern that is presented, the way the various components of the total verbal and non-verbal behavior manifested interrelate with each other within the overall communicative process. The following explanation and illustration will hopefully make this clear.

To begin with, features and modes and other aspects of the communicative process, channel, setting, etc., correlate with others to form a system such that the presence of a single significant feature or mode, or a significant combination of them, often signals an entire program, i.e., sequence of events and probable outcome, which can be said to give "meaning" or "message" to a particular feature or mode. Every program therefore is structured, consisting

of an objective and a means of achieving it, the objective generally determining the means that shall be employed. For example, provoking violence is effectively accomplished for mainstream people through the establishment of a mode of "confrontation." However, as the end specifies the means, so the means employed reciprocally specify a range of "probable" or "possible" objectives. Since only the means: feature, mode, setting, are visible, ends are generally inferred from an analysis of them. So, to a mainstream person, a "grim" confrontation between men initiates a program which suggests that a violent resolution is imminent. On the other hand, if the men suddenly break out into laughter, the mainstream observer relaxes, reinterpreting the original "grim" confrontation to have been a "put-on" or something else that could be considered plausible explanation of what happened. Looked at from the view of cultural programming, laughter was a <u>significant</u> cultural signal, sufficient to cause the mainstream observer to <u>revise</u> his original interpretation, i.e., to assign to the message: confrontation + grimness followed by laughter, a different "meaning", i.e., program with another sequence and resolution, than he would have assigned had the message consisted of confrontation + grimness followed by verbal abuse, which he would feel with increasing "certainty" was preparatory to violence. Yet it is precisely because his perceptions and notions have been so systematized (programmed!) that he would fail to "make any sense" of two Black male teenagers within a larger peer group engaging in a program consisting of confrontation + verbal abuse which results in laughter. For him such a program is implausible or bizarre, since in his culture such a "combination"

invariably led to a fight. An observer familiar with Black culture, however, would recognize the program in operation to be what in Chicago is called signifying, the "rules" of which do not necessarily call for violence. At the basis of cultural "misunderstanding", then, is that persons of respectively different cultural groups assign to a pattern of behavior exhibited by members of the other cultural group the meaning that pattern has in their own culture. To the extent that the "rules" governing cultural programming are different, is the degree to which communicative interference exists, which can be further identified as the cultural source of communication failure. "Combustible" ingredients are those aspects of the "message" to which mainstream and non-mainstream members of our society respectively are likely to assign a different meaning, and which are likely to disturb any meaningful communication between respective members of the two groups, as each, wittingly or unwittingly, will regard the program initiated by the other as subversive, i.e., effective for achieving some other goal, but antithetical to achieving what was the "intended", i.e., stated, purpose of their meeting.

Let us examine these points of interference further, especially within a context where the declared purpose of the gathering was to reach some form of agreement.

As we mentioned above, it is the means that are visible, that become the basis of interpretation, i.e., from which a program: sequence and resolution, are inferred. Therefore, the mainstream person infers from the introduction of feeling and loudness by the non-mainstream person two programs simultaneously, one "positive"

and one "negative". The "positive" program is what the mainstream person feels the presence of feeling and loudness will "lead to", and the "negative" program is what the mainstream person feels the presence of feeling and loudness will prevent achieving, such as a "satisfactory" resolution of "differences". Specifically, the presence of an outward show of feeling suggests negatively that the meeting is "getting out of hand", or "out of control", which means out of the domain where "reason" and "words" rule to the "positive" area where physical force, or the threat of such, will dominate. The combustible combination of ingredients for mainstream people, as indicated, is words + "temper" + confrontation = violence. Therefore, if the mainstream person keeps out or tones down feeling, he feels he has effectively obviated the inevitable "spontaneous combustion" that will come about from the above combination. However, the mainstream person does not only reject "feeling and loudness" because it introduces a spectre of violence; he rejects it because it prevents achieving the "prerequisite" means through which one is able to arrive at solutions, namely, the attainment of a posture of "neutral" objectivity individually, and a mode of "cooperation" collectively, with others engaged in the "same" pursuit. This can be seen from observing contexts where the spectre of violence is non-existent, such as at professional meetings, where scholars "end up" in "heated discussion" with each other, the "heated" portion being that which their colleagues regard as "self-defeating" if one is "seriously interested" in "finding out the truth", and which occurrence more often than not between the two parties is attributed to "personality conflict".

In contrast, an "outward show of feeling" has a much wider range of meaning to non-mainstream people, and within the program governed by the "rules" for "resolving disagreement", signals "honest conviction", "sincerity", which in turn become the basis for establishing "credibility".[6] Also, in other contexts, as illustrated earlier by the Black cultural program known as signifying, there are several programs in which a non-mainstream person does exhibit an outward show of "anger" or "temper" but which do not culminate in violence. For example, in addition to signifying, there are specific Black cultural programs known as shucking, jiving, and woofing, which frequently operate under the rule, expressed by a West African proverb, that "only a fool feels the anger that he shows", pointing up a dichotomy that mainstream people do not generally make, and would therefore have great difficulty

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[6]One of the problems with mainstream people's identification of feeling when the latter is manifest in public contexts is that it is either interpreted too narrowly, as "anger" or "temper", or too generally, as "excitement", betraying a diminished vocabulary in this area due to a limited number of public "programs" where feeling is a significant cultural feature. This restriction prevents an accurate identification of the range of feeling actually manifested by non-mainstream people. The consequence of this failure is especially unfortunate as people often react not to the actual feeling that is exhibited but to their diagnosis of it. As a result of a limited terminology and programming in this vital area, the mainstream person is unable to identify the feeling either to himself or to others as anything but "anger" or some equivalent, despite the existence of qualifiers, with the result that he reacts to the person as if the feeling that the latter exhibited within his program was in fact one of anger, an interesting and important illustration of the degree to which language influences our perception, and in turn, in communication, "programs" our response.

distinguishing in others who do.[7] On the other hand, as a general cultural feature of non-mainstream people whose norms have been processed by oral structures, when anger is not only shown but felt, then the element of self- or group-control enters into the picture at some critical juncture to obviate violence. Even here there is evidence that the "critical juncture" for non-mainstream people occurs at a degree of greater intensity than for mainstream people. Perhaps an accurate comparative statement would be to say that "critical juncture" (when angry words become violent acts) occurs for mainstream people right after the onset, reflecting their belief that anger becomes increasingly difficult to control once it "gets started" which seems to us to be an accurate characterization of mainstream personalities, but one requiring further study. For non-mainstream people, the "critical juncture" seems to occur not right after the onset of the expression of feeling or anger, but at some further point along the line, allowing for not only a greater expression of feeling but also control of it. It is as if there were different "boiling points" in operation, with mainstream people perceiving "combustion" to occur at a significantly lower point than non-mainstream people do.

This was in evidence at the above referenced meeting where a

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[7] See Thomas Kochman, "Toward an Ethnography of Black American Speech Behavior", in Norm Witten and John Szwed (eds.), Afro-American Anthropology (The Free Press) for a descriptive analysis of signifyin and shuckin and jivin. Note also, however, that this is a specific ethnic program, as opposed to a general cultural feature of oral societies and could therefore have its counterpart with other specific ethnic groups within the larger society. For example, the "bluff" and "bravado" among the Irish-American suggest that they also have an ethnic "program" governed by a similar rule.

Black bicultural faculty member, noting the worried and anxious look on the faces of his mainstream colleagues present with respect to his angry tone, felt he needed to reassure them of their safety when he said, "You don't have to worry. I'm still talking. When I stop talking, then you might have to worry." Therefore, within a number of non-mainstream cultural programs it is not "inevitable", as mainstream people believe, that violence "follows" the exchange of "angry" words; yet from a communications standpoint, the "fear" or "anxiety" that such anger produces in mainstream people gives non-mainstream people the impression that mainstream people are "easily frightened" and are "weak". Mainstream people, on the other hand, perceive they are being "threatened", a feeling compounded by the myth which they hold that non-mainstream people are "prone to violence".

Looking at the obverse of the above, let us examine how non-mainstream people interpret mainstream people's outward show of "reserve" and "calm". Like the mainstream person in our discussion above, the non-mainstream person also infers two programs simultaneously, one positive and one negative, from analyzing the means (features and mode) exhibited by mainstream people. The "positive" program is what the non-mainstream person feels the "outward show of calm and reserve" is likely to "lead to", and the "negative" program is what he feels such a posture will prevent achieving, such as a "satisfactory" resolution of differences.

Non-mainstream people generally characterize the program for which an "outward show of calm and reserve" is appropriate as "devious" and "dishonest", "designed to conceal true motivation

and intent." This interpretation is consistent with the meaning that Black people, for example, themselves assign to various masking postures that they assume when they feel they are being manipulated or where they need to be defensive, or where it is their intent to be devious and manipulative. For example, several of my Black students in a racially mixed class initially like to sit in the back of the room where they can "scope" the white students, i.e., watch and evaluate them, without being scrutinized in return. They clearly perceive their posture and role here as being devious and manipulative, i.e., designed to give them some sort of "advantage" or, rather, trying to equalize the "disadvantage" of being one percent of the university population, much like "sizing up" an unfamiliar situation before "moving in" or "opening up", a caution which minorities have traditionally found necessary to survival. An "honest" role for these same students, as evidenced later in the course, is one in which a person speaks his mind openly and sincerely, not "holding back" or "concealing" what he thinks and feels, and if one gets "emotional" in the process of this expression, all the better because that only lends "conviction" to what he says. Misunderstanding and conflict occur in the above classroom setting because the culturally sanctioned "rules" governing the "public listening" mode of mainstream students define a basically passive and receptive, as opposed to argumentative, posture, in which the students are under no felt obligation to speak what's on their minds. This "concealment" of thought, silence, or when speaking, of feeling through an "outward show of reserve and calm", is regarded by Black and other non-mainstream students as "cheating";

but with what intent? The non-mainstream students, being also minority students with all that that implies, rationalize their "deviousness" in potentially hazardous situations as necessary to survival, as well it has been. But what then can be the motivation for the "deviousness" of mainstream people? Not survival, certainly, as "they" have all the power. Then what? The interpretation that comes through consistently is exploitation, an inference obviously not only produced as a result of the interference of cultural systems, but one reinforced by the political, economic, and social realities of our society. Non-mainstream minority students conceive of themselves as members of a group that constitute the "colonized", i.e., those who are exploited economically, politically, and socially within the larger society, and the white students as members of the group that is the "colonizer", and likely to hold views that will perpetuate the "colonial" situation or that will otherwise work to their detriment. By keeping silent, most of the white students don't let what they are contradict or reinforce what they represent.

The white mainstream students, of course, are bewildered at the imputed motivation, since they see themselves as acting "naturally". Typically, they will say, "But I hardly ever talk in class," statements which substantiate the feeling that they are acting in accordance with the rules that define for them what is the "proper" public listening mode. That response invariably is viewed as suspect. Only those white students who do express their views openly, and allow themselves to be "confronted" and challenged by the non-mainstream students in the class are respected by them. Contempt

is generally expressed for the others who are perceived as "cowardly". The same situation occurs at meetings such as the one described above between mainstream faculty and non-mainstream community residents. Within that context, the silence or absence of any outward show of feeling by the faculty denied the community residents that which reassures them and which affirms confidence, trust, and credibility, which led the community residents to the conclusion that mainstream people cannot be trusted, or are cold, insincere, indifferent, callous, and devious.

The "negative" program that non-mainstream will feel that the mainstream person's outward show of reserve and calm will <u>prevent</u> achieving is a "resolution" of differences. Here he characterizes both the features and mode of mainstream people as inappropriate, i.e., as non-functional for arriving at what he perceives would be a "satisfactory" solution.

We have already discussed how non-mainstream people view the absence of feeling "positively", i.e., for what program and resolution it <u>is</u> appropriate, i.e., manipulation, motivated by "survival" or "exploitation". It remains to be shown why non-mainstream people feel its absence is inappropriate for arriving at "agreement". For one, they perceive the mainstream person's insistence on "calm" as diluting the intensity of his belief, thereby weakening the conviction with which he holds that belief. This perception is, of course, accurate and <u>is</u> the unspoken objective of the mainstream means of arriving at agreement, i.e., by suppressing feeling one <u>does</u> weaken personal conviction and that is the necessary prerequisite toward achieving "neutral objectivity"; as we will show later

in our discussion of "conflict of ends", within the mainstream program, personal conviction and feeling is irrelevant to arriving at truth, answer, solution, etc. Therefore, since the non-mainstream person's total being is integrated into his belief system, to ask him to compromise it (a "dirty" word to non-mainstream people) is to insult and attack both his personal dignity and integrity. Consonant with this view is the non-mainstream perspective of the mainstream mode of cooperation, which he sees as asking him to assume toward his opponent a posture before disagreement resolved that he feels is only appropriate if and when, i.e., after, disagreement is resolved. To the mainstream person, one needs to reduce conflict in order to resolve disagreement. To non-mainstream people, one can only reduce conflict after one has resolved disagreement, which is, after all, the basis of conflict. By asking him first to reduce conflict is in effect telling him that the basis for his opposition and the righteous conviction with which he holds his belief, as mentioned earlier, is negotiable, as it also prepares him for what the mainstream person finally accepts as the "resolution" of "differences", namely, compromise, something that the non-mainstream person, by virtue of the integrity (oneness, wholeness) of his being, does not regard or accept as a "solution" at all, since it tells him something is "negotiable" that he does not regard as "negotiable" at all. That is why wars between oral-traditional people are always "holy" ones, in which "principles" are involved. Note that mainstream people view this "integrity", unwillingness to compromise one's beliefs, negatively, as "rigidity", as Howard Higman has pointed out, since mainstream people have been conditioned

to regard their belief and value systems as something negotiable.[8]

For non-mainstream people the appropriate mode for resolving disagreement is oral confrontation, where the "battle" is with words instead of weapons. Because of its similarity to battle, however, mainstream people are likely to see confrontation not only as not functional for resolving disagreement, but, on the contrary, as intensifying rather than softening the conviction with which opposing views are held, and therefore inappropriate. Yet confrontation, or dynamic opposition, is perceived as functional for non-mainstream people for resolving differences of opinion, belief and value. For each to hold such a view and regard respectively different modes as functional and non-functional suggests to us that there is not only interference with respect to the means for arriving at a "satisfactory" solution, but that there is a strong possibility that there are different underlying conceptions over what qualifies as a "satisfactory" solution, or answer. The likelihood that there is a disagreement of means because of a disagreement of ends was suggested by a statement made by Grace Lee Boggs in an article by her in the Monthly Review (September, 1970, p. 30). "Truth" is "something which is constantly being created through conflict in the social arena." The key words here are created and conflict. Conflict, we have seen, comes about by each disagreeing party advancing his own position, producing a clash of words, thoughts, ideas, values. The resolution of that clash is the prevailing "truth". Therefore, if conflict is essential to arriving at truth, then the

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[8] Howard Higman, "Hypotheses on Conflict, Systematic Inertia, and Poverty," (mimeographed 1968).

mode of confrontation is certainly an appropriate one for the creation of dynamic opposition, which via the oral-aural channel of communication has a long tradition in the academic arena, known there as rhetoric, argumentation, and dialectical debate. While the contemporary mainstream personality may find such a mode alien to his conceptions and sensibilities, Ong reminds us that this "agonistic" element is typically characteristic of oral societies, was characteristic of pre-literate "mainstream" society of an earlier era, and to our view is presently characteristic of oral cultures within our larger literate contemporary society. For this reason Boggs' statement is representative of the general non-mainstream population of our society, whose communicative norms and perspectives have been predominantly shaped and defined by "oral" structures. As Ong notes,

> By an extension of oral practices into literate society and even for a while into early typographical society, the agonistic element in learning is perpetuated through the arts of rhetoric and dialectic, which governed all academic practice from antiquity through the Renaissance. During that period no one was ever formally taught neutral objectivity, ... A scholar was taught to defend a stand he had taken or to attack the stand of another: rhetorical performance and dialectical debate governed all subjects. Truth was a human possession, to be defended as one's own life. This long persistence of agonistic frames of reference suggests how thoroughly polemic had been oral man's life world. [italics mine] [9]

Ong's statement is especially helpful in clarifying the meaning and perspective behind Boggs' use of the word "created". The key phrase here is, "Truth is a human possession," because if truth is a human possession then it is something that exists within a person, is basically subjective, and not, as literate mainstream people

[9] Op.cit., p. 642.

believe, something that exists outside of the person, which is basically objective. If the repository of truth is within man, then man can create or generate truth. If the repository of truth is outside of man, then he can only discover or derive it. In the creative process, feeling is quite functional since it testifies to the degree to which man believes and is willing to defend the truth that he himself possesses and generates. In the discovery process, feeling becomes irrelevant on the one hand, since conviction, the merging of feeling and belief, is only meaningful if truth is something which man can possess and generate, and on the other, a distraction, as it interferes with man's capacity to achieve neutral objectivity, the means by which Western literate man derives truth. In effect, in order to become the "dispassionate" observer, participant, and recorder--note the often used term "dispassionate", i.e., free from being regulated by feeling--mainstream man must learn to fragment his being, separate reason from emotion, which he attempts to accomplish by suppressing feeling. To the extent that he is successful in this endeavor he can learn to "act without reacting, without involvement" as McLuhan has noted.

> Oral cultures act and react at the same time. Phonetic culture endows men with the means of repressing their feelings and emotions when engaged in action. To act without reacting, without involvement, is the peculiar advantage of Western Literate man.[10]

So the anthropologist can participate and observe without commitment or involvement and be regulated by his discipline, just as the "academic" disciplines themselves reflect the fragmentation process of literary societies. So when an American Indian youth,

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[10] Understanding Media, p. 88.

bent on suicide, lifts his gun to his head, the Anthropologist records, "At 9:25 he lifted the gun, hesitated, and then pulled the trigger." Were the Anthropologist to intervene and exhort the Indian not to pull the trigger, something a whole person would automatically do, he would no longer be doing "anthropology" but "social work", something which his "discipline" cautions against.

If truth is generated, the social arena clearly becomes the forum for its expression. Orally, truth is created through argumentation, through dynamic opposition (conflict!), the point and counter-point of dialectical debate. The "truth" that prevails is the one that cannot be refuted, or the one closest in line with what the collectivity present perceive (believe!) actuality to be. Through this creative process, belief and value systems are challenged and changed in accordance with the better view of reality expressed within the social arena.

As an aid in achieving objectivity literate man is taught to value abstraction, the mental process which allows him to step outside of himself and generalize about himself and the world. Oral man's locus of knowledge is more concrete, as Ong notes,

> Preliterate cultures were immersed in an event-world because of their inability to structure knowledge other than around human beings.

which is to say that oral man's world-view has as its foundation the individual and collective experience of the group, processed through a form that acknowledges a consensus, and extended over time by means of narrative. Literary mainstream man's world-view has as its foundation scientific method: observation, analysis, experimentation, processed through a form that acknowledges individually

acquired knowledge and expertise: books, articles, papers. These different foundations of knowledge and their respective channels of expression within our society form respectively the basis of two cultures: the vernacular ("mother-wit", "common sense", "sidewalk philosopher") and the "learned".

The communicative norms of mainstream and non-mainstream people reflect the respectively different orientations described above. Mainstream man, in interpersonal relations, attempts to avoid confrontation because that mode accentuates that which he is trying to suppress, namely feeling. He tries to suppress feeling because the presence of the latter is antithetical to the operation of pure reason. Within the mainstream cultural program regulating the "discovery" process, reason and emotion are incompatible. It is felt that the presence of the latter detracts from the efficient operation of the former. To achieve an objective end requires objective means. A fragmented personality dominated by reason is the objective means that mainstream man tries to become; by investing and transforming his being into method he maximizes his instrumentality, which again becomes useful and efficient in an achievement-oriented society where individuals are seen and treated as means and not ends, as noted in chapter one.

Where mainstream man is the mediator, or is himself part of a mediation process where differences need to be resolved, and where the power differential is neutralized or is indecisive, then "compromise" of differences is seen as the "solution". To mainstream man, power primarily defines the accommodation process and also determines what is negotiable. Mainstream people's modus operandi,

as Higman has noted, is characterized by "flexibility and opportunism" which says that, in the face of power, belief and value systems are negotiable. Where power is neutralized or stalemated, mainstream men "split the difference". Why compromise should be seen as the "natural" resolution of disagreement by mainstream people should be easier to see as a result of the above discussion. Accustomed to fragmenting himself in the inquiry process through the suppression of feeling, and taught that personal conviction is irrelevant to the "quest", it actually becomes easier for mainstream man to "give in" or "give up" views in which he "believes". Therefore, as Howard Higman has noted, a mainstream person does not find it difficult to "subordinate personal differences for the purpose of achieving an unanimous vote" or applying for "more opportunities than he has any conception of potentially winning."[11] In saying, "It doesn't hurt to try," the mainstream personality is in fact saying, "It doesn't hurt to lose" and thereby demonstrates the degree to which he has suppressed the "traditional notion of pride" to accommodate his "new-found role of opportunist." On the other hand, as Higman notes, "It is difficult for traditional persons with even slightly different values to act in concert. The differences in their values and the integrity of their personalities prevent them from acting together."[12] Therefore, while "compromise" is seen by mainstream people as not only pragmatic, but "right", i.e., sanctioned by custom and morality within his culture, it is not seen as a "resolution" by non-mainstream people, but as a "defeat" and

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[11] Higman, p. 6.

[12] Higman, p. 7.

has no moral sanction within their cultural value system.

In the past discussion we have made frequent reference to the thesis that significant differences between the cultural personalities and communication patterns of non-mainstream and mainstream people, respectively, can be attributed to the former having been predominantly transformed by the structures of an oral society, in contrast to the latter having been shaped predominantly by the structures of a literary society. A key effect of this different cultural process has been, as we have mentioned and somewhat illustrated above, that literate societies produce personalities and cultures that are characterized by fragmentation (division), whereas oral societies produce such that are characterized by wholeness (integrity). We have yet to show something of the process by which structures of literate and oral societies produce these effects. For example, in chapter one we spoke of bureaucracies and hierarchies as processing structures respectively reflecting a uniform horizontal and vertical segmentation of the work process and of the people responsible for its operation. While such a structure is itself a cultural processing agency, it also is an extension of a principle of visual organization that attempts to impose a lineal sequence on reality, a principle suggested originally by the accomplishments of literacy, and continued by virtue of the control it has given man to manipulate his environment. As McLuhan has noted,

> Only alphabetic cultures have ever mastered connected lineal sequences as pervasive forms of psychic and social organization. The breaking up of every kind of experience into uniform units in order to produce faster action and change of form (applied knowledge) has been the secret of Western power over man and nature alike.[13]

[13] Understanding Media, p. 88.

As Ong has noted, the fragmentation or division process in literate societies first comes about sensuously: sight is isolated and enhanced through various stages from, and at the expense of, the other senses: hearing, smell, taste, and touch. Through the reading and writing process, words on paper are soon perceived as the representation of experience and reality and become in time the preferential channel for such representation. The effects of this "bias" will be discussed below. Literate-minded people are taught to view experience in terms of its typographical presentation, i.e., as determined by the requirements of the written medium. So reporting of events essentially tends toward recording what people said and did: the observables, which is after all readily communicable through print; the visual lends itself to be communicated visually. Therefore, abstracted from an event are those things that are recordable generally at the expense of those that are not. How is one to report, however, on what was felt in an event? With no recording device available to register and measure it, we can only acknowledge the presence and texture of feeling aurally, i.e., by what people said about what they felt, and visually, by what we read about what people said about what they felt. This process, by which the content is diluted (distraction is a form of dilution!) by each succeeding medium, eventually reduces the significance of that content which cannot readily or easily be expressed through the channel or medium being employed. To the extent that we focus on the medium, we are distracted from the content, something Wallace Stevens was well aware of when he wrote in "Peter Quince at the Clavier" ("Music is feeling, then, not sound"). Yet we acknowledge that the oral

channel is more expressive of feeling than the visual and for which reason plays a more important role in communication in oral societies than in literate ones. We have already acknowledged above the limited number of mainstream cultural programs, for example, in which feeling is a significant factor. "Charmed" by the principle of visual organization, as Ong has noted, we introduce it in all areas of human activity. So when our young daughter comes home crying from playing outside, we say, "Now stop crying, and tell me what happened." Unable by conditioning to respond to feeling directly (sound as medium acknowledges the presence of feeling more than sight, and touch more than sound) we can respond only to the observables: "Who said and did what to whom?", which become the picture of what happened. Also, in order to "find out" what happened, the crying child had to suppress her feelings, i.e., by stifling the sound that most meaningfully expressed those feelings, to satisfy the principle of visual organization and lineal sequencing that her literary oriented parent demanded. The ultimate picture that is drawn not only provides the requisite information but also constitutes the rationale and justification for being upset. As noted elsewhere, "Were we oriented differently the crying might be telling enough."[14]

In oral cultures, the world is not presented as view but as event, as Ong has discussed. In an event, all senses are activated simultaneously, just as speakers, audience, setting, activity, channel, mode, gesture, are simultaneously experienced and

[14]Thomas Kochman, "Reading, Culture and Personality," The Florida FL Reporter, Spring/Fall, 1970.

differentially digested and "understood". The impact of an event: collective interaction, sound, presence, spontaneity, movement is hardly "seen" at all, rather, experienced wholly. What printed words fail to communicate of events often goes unnoticed to literate people, conditioned as they are to constructing a "view" of things, charmed either by the medium of the printed word, or its content, focusing invariably on what is communicated rather than on what is not. To oral people, accustomed to a total involvement of being, living in an event world, the fragmentation process involved in reading and writing is especially onerous, requiring for reception or expression a sequential linear reduction of their being in time and space. For oral non-mainstream people that is often conceived by them as a reductio ad absurdum. As McLuhan confirms, "Print asks for the isolated and stripped-down visual faculty, not for the unified sensorium,"[15] as does the medium of TV or the participation within an event.

Bias

As discussed above, to the extent that mainstream man can suppress his emotions and thereby accentuate his rational faculty, the closer he will be able to become the "detached" or "dispassionate" observer, free from the personal (subjective!) "bias" that feeling (sentiment!) invariably produces. For him the computer represents the ultimate in "depersonalization", an extension of man's nervous system as McLuhan has noted, yet without the "executive syndrome": ulcers, heart-burn, depression, paranoia, etc., that symbolizes mainstream man's failure to achieve "objectivity" and "instrumentality".

[15] Understanding Media, p. 269.

Yet, despite his failure, in the process of striving for objectivity he learns to disparage the subjective knowledge gained from experience as being somewhat "distorted" and to value the knowledge gained from "scientific inquiry" as being more "impartial" or "value-free". In so doing he also values the written channel, through which scientific studies have been made manifest, over the oral channel, through which experience is generally made known, not only because of the nature of the source of information or of the method used in acquiring it, or the channel through which it is disseminated per se, but also because the conditions under which he reads something: quiet solitude, as opposed to the conditions under which he hears it, are less pressured, i.e., reflect circumstances in which other "influences" or "distractions" are absent or kept to a minimum that would otherwise disturb his concentration: power to comprehend and evaluate.

Contemporary Blacks and other non-mainstream ("third world") people are scornful of the "need" for a "study" before any kind of positive social action can be taken. You hear, "what does the Man need to know that he don't already know, to get rid of poverty, rats, etc." Or, "He don't need a study when it means comin down here bustin heads," and so on. Also, non-mainstream people feel that if mainstream people tend to believe what they read and discredit what they hear (hearsay), then discrimination doesn't exist until a "study" says it does, and slavery "wasn't so bad" because the "history" books said so. This bias is especially detrimental since, in the public mind, history is not only seen as a "record" of what happened, it is often viewed as the totality of what

happened. Therefore, what is left unrecorded not only doesn't become "history" but is often interpreted as not having happened. So, until a public oral channel (television!) became accessible to Black oral style (narrative!) to point out the deliberate and selective omissions within the literature, the Black experience "did not happen". It is clear that mainstream man's bias of regarding the written channel to be more "credible" than the oral, and the knowledge gained from a "scientific" study to be better ("truer!") than what is learned from one's own experience or that of one's group, clearly works to the disadvantage of oral non-mainstream people in presenting their "case" to the public. This has been offset significantly by the credibility that television has acquired in the public mind. Yet what is considered as even a worse bias by non-mainstream people is the mainstream notion that because they strive to acquire a posture of objectivity, somehow they have come closer to achieving a "bias-free" perspective. Non-mainstream people regard this to be illusory, a self-deception at best, and at worst, a deliberate and devious promotion of mainstream interests under a guise of "impartiality". What the non-mainstream person feels the mainstream person accomplishes in striving for "neutral objectivity" is not to "free" his bias, but to "conceal" it. Non-mainstream people acknowledge and deal from a "point of view", i.e., bias. They feel that a resolution of differences can only come about after one acknowledges in both mind and body that differences exist and have a human origin. They reject the notion that the pattern of discrimination that has emerged in northern cities in housing and employment is not as a result of an operational bias,

which they feel northern "honkies" attempt to disguise. That's why Blacks prefer the open hostility of the southern "cracker" ("At least you know where you're at") to the camouflaged antagonism of the northern "honkie", "who says one thing but does another."

Evaluation

Looked at in terms of its historical development, the posture of "neutral objectivity" was considered the functional means for the acquisition of "scientific" truths such as one finds in the area of the physical sciences. We acknowledge that humans do not "possess" the "scientific" answers that are most appropriately derived by following the scientific method: observation, calculation, analysis, "proof". What we do determine to be the problem, however, is the familiar one of a misapplication of means to ends; namely, a method that was functional and effective in the area of the physical sciences is also judged to be appropriate for use in the area of human affairs, yet where the truth sought after is not physical or chemical in nature, but psychological and philosophical. As Ong has noted, "The success of vision (observation) and quantification in the physical sciences has charmed the modern mind into considering its own activity as essentially like that of sight."[16] So we see a misapplication of means that were effective in accomplishing one kind of objective into an area where they are ineffective or even disfunctional, much as "decomposition" of a poem as the basis for "understanding" it yields far fewer rewards than that

[16] Ong, p. 636.

same method of analysis applied to building a bridge or "understanding" a chemical reaction in a laboratory. As Ong has noted,

> ...most philosophers from Locke through Kant and many down to the present day not only accept the physical universe in exclusively visualist terms but also treat understanding itself by analogy with visual knowledge to the virtual exclusion of analogies with any of the other senses. [emphasis mine][17]

There seems to be little doubt that mainstream man strives for the same type of "objectivity" in solving human problems as a result of his cultural orientation, as he does for solving scientific problems, such that it is very difficult for mainstream man even to acknowledge his suppressed feelings as being a potent and even primary motivating factor affecting what he does and how he interacts with others. He has even been culturally programmed to feel embarrassed or guilty over having shown feeling. The fallacy of mainstream man's attempt to achieve objectivity in the area of human affairs becomes most apparent when he attempts to solve a human problem with a method that attempts to suppress feeling, i.e., through "rational inquiry", even though what he feels is the very core of the problem. How can he acknowledge his feeling using a method that requires that he suppress and deny it? To assist mainstream man to acknowledge and identify his feelings, and thereby enhance his subjectivity, as well as hopefully dispel the pretense of the need for "objectivity" in the area of human relations, seems to be one of the goals behind the creation of "cultural sensitivity" training, thereby hoping to accomplish that which non-mainstream oral people are already culturally programmed from

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[17] Ong, op.cit.

childhood to be able to do. It is also interesting to note that confrontation is one of the modes used in sensitivity training to get the mainstream person to acknowledge this "subjectivity".

In evaluating the "traditionalism" or oral-non-mainstream people vis-a-vis the "flexible opportunism" of literate mainstream people, we acknowledge merits and flaws in both cultural modes. For example, we would like to see traditional people be more "flexible" in their disputes, which occasionally explode into "holy wars", and often into "feuds" that carry on for centuries, if only to avoid the "blood baths" and human suffering that invariably occur under those circumstances.

On the other hand, we are chagrined that all "matters of conscience" seem to be negotiable to mainstream personalities to the point where it is questionable whether they have any ethical principles left which are absolute: i.e., not compromisable. For example, it remained for exponents of the "counter-culture", sons and daughters of mainstream people, following the impetus and direction provided by Blacks and other "third world" people, to raise the moral issues surrounding racism, the Vietnam War, environmental pollution, crass materialism, and to remind us that destruction and deterioration of human life that result from motivations of greed, abuse of power, and exploitation, are equally as reprehensible, maybe more so, than human suffering emanating from self-righteousness.

Fragmentation versus Integrity

It becomes increasingly difficult to differentially evaluate the various respective structures of oral and literate societies

simply because we recognize that, in terms of our value system (humanism!), we see both positive and negative effects resulting from them. As McLuhan has noted, for example, "If Western literate man undergoes much dissociation of inner sensibility from his use of the alphabet, he also wins his personal freedom to dissociate himself from clan and family."[18] We applaud the benefits to humanity that accrue from "individual discovery", the latter made possible generally only in societies that provide for psychological withdrawal, such as predominantly literary ones, which allow the individual to isolate himself and his thought processes from the group, something generally frustrated in oral cultures, as Ong has noted,

> Thought is not advanced by Aristotles or Einsteins or other individual discoverers but rather moves ahead with glacial slowness: everyone must advance together.[19]

On the other hand, we also recognize the disastrous effects to the world that have been essentially brought about by fragmented literary man with his "individually" won freedom and his acquired ability to "act without reacting", and agree in large measure with George Leonard in indicting the process which has trained people to

> split their world into separate symbolic systems, the better to cope with and manipulate it. Such "education," suprarationalistic and analytical to the extreme, has made possible colonialism, the production line, space voyaging and the H-bomb. But it has not made people happy or whole, nor does it offer them ways to change, deep down...[20]

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[18] McLuhan, p. 90.

[19] Ong, p. 643.

[20] George Leonard, Education and Ecstasy, p. 14.

The problem arises when we consider that people act and respond in a manner consistent with their "organic" (biological and cultural) development. How can we assure that fragmented mainstream man, having the capacity to "act without reacting", and pursue an individual course unregulated by kin or clan, will operate only in a manner that will benefit, but not exploit, man and his environment, or that the "integrity" of oral-traditional man which lends itself to the creation of ethical and aesthetic absolutes will form the basis of conviction, but not to the point of intolerance and arbitrary self-righteousness?

Ideally, we would like to admit the possibility of individuals capable of being <u>both</u> fragmented <u>and</u> whole, not entirely or exclusively one or the other, fragmented in the pursuit of scientific truths, whole in the creation of human truths. We acknowledge through our own experience the existence of a small but significant number of these persons within our society who as a result of individual effort can be said to possess this complementary distribution. The question is, given the present state of and polarization between mainstream and non-mainstream people in our contemporary society, whether such a bicultural alternation or synthesis can be realized on a large enough scale as to effect a <u>general</u> difference in the way members of these groups presently interact with each other. We say this even as we acknowledge that most Blacks and other non-mainstream people are already "bicultural", i.e., participate in varying degrees in both mainstream and non-mainstream cultures, and are potentially in the best position to abstract and/or synthesize the best that the two cultures have to offer. Yet the

socio-political realities outlined in the first chapter are such as are likely to prevent non-mainstream people from considering mainstream cultural norms as having anything other than operational (survival!) values for them, just as it has blinded mainstream culturites from seeing anything of intrinsic cultural value among the various non-mainstream ("ethnic") groups with whom they coexist, individual exceptions notwithstanding.

Therefore, if biculturalism, for mainstream and non-mainstream people alike, is to provide within its framework the basis for the "resolution" (reciprocity!) of communication differences sought after here, then consideration first has to be given to resolving the social differences (the power differential, the "colonial" relationship) that presently make such a "bicultural" resolution impossible.

What this means is that cultural differences only begin to matter when social differences no longer do, i.e., when the power differential between communicating parties is negligible. Said in the positive, where the social preeminence of either one of the communicating parties is decisive in determining whose "rules" (socio-cultural norms) shall govern the character or course of the interaction, then the cultural requirements and sensibilities of the unequal party are not seen as deserving of consideration, let alone deference. Under such conditions, the unequal party is expected to suppress whatever code requirements he might otherwise be able to insist upon in situations where he is a more equal party. What I have just described here are precisely the social conditions under which "cultural ethnocentrism" and "cultural supremacy"

flourish, as discussed in the first chapter. There the issue for the dominant culture, as determined by the assimilationist ideology, was one of social dominance, namely, which socio-cultural system shall prevail. And judging by the mainstream cultural response to various pluralistic grumblings throughout the country, most notably as expressed around the issue of school board decentralization, dominance is still the issue. Under those circumstances, cultural systems, even when recognized as such, are nevertheless still viewed wholly, not examined for specific points of disagreement that are likely to "cause misunderstanding." What takes precedence, therefore, is the social value of a cultural system as determined by the amount of power that members of the group that uses that cultural system have in the larger society. So to attempt to "reconcile" cultural differences that cause conflict in communication already assumes that social differences, that have up to the present time been responsible for the exclusion of minority group norms from consideration, will somehow have become equalized to the point where cultural differences can then become the "negotiable" items. This is not to say that cultural differences are not sufficient to produce communication failure when the power differential is not a determining factor. They are. What it does say is that wherever a power differential is present in communication, it is decisive in directing the nature of the communicative process. To paraphrase a recent statement made on television by a rural father to his son that seems relevant to this discussion, "The differences between city boys and country boys is that in the city boys feel they need to understand their pa; here in the country

they just need to obey him." It was for that reason that we began our discussion of sources of communication failure in our society with those that are social in origin, which we regard as primary, before we considered those that were cultural in origin, which, by virtue of the forces directing communication, must be viewed as secondary.

Equalizing Communication: Socially and Culturally

In view of the previous discussion, it ought to be clear that mainstream people, as a result of a lifetime of hierarchical posturing and maneuvering and status seeking, recognize social differences and the need for making social adjustments on the basis of these differences. The social "adjustment" program that the mainstream person will initiate will consist of either the assumption of or the surrendering of prerogative, in the form of arrogance and privilege on the one extreme to humility and service on the other, depending on the social gap between the parties involved. The form of social adjustment, depending on the experience of those making it, can be subtle or obvious. To the experienced mainstream person, attempts at social code switching by the inexperienced, such as non-mainstream persons, are often seen as comical or exaggerated, since the latter, kept near the bottom of the social hierarchy, have little opportunity within their communications network to learn the numerous social programs that make up the mainstream social code.

On the other hand, accustomed as the mainstream person is to a lifetime of operating under a single set of cultural norms, he is

unlikely to understand the operation of the "other" cultural system used by non-mainstream people, assuming even that he recognizes that they have a separate and legitimate cultural system--mainstream people have generally attributed differences within their own country to social class, i.e., lack of "education", rather than to culture--nor is he likely to understand the extent to which communication across cultural lines may necessitate his making cultural adjustments, i.e., respecting the non-mainstream cultural system by using it, much as communicating across social lines has necessitated his making social adjustments, i.e., learning to use the mainstream social code, the latter being, however, something he already understands and respects.

In contrast, non-mainstream people develop an ability to switch cultural codes at a very early stage in their contact with mainstream people, first in school, then on the job. Therefore, what emerges from the above portrait is that mainstream people have greater competence than non-mainstream people in understanding the social code operating within the mainstream hierarchy, and obviously greater competence within their own cultural system. On the other hand, they generally have only a negligible competence, if any, of the non-mainstream cultural system, or of the social code that operates outside of the mainstream hierarchy. For example, what do mainstream people know about what social code operates on the street? Non-mainstream people, then, not only have competence of their own social and cultural system, but competence to a significant degree of mainstream society and culture, with the result that the total social and cultural competence is greater than that

of mainstream people. It will only become equalized when mainstream people know as much about non-mainstream people as the latter know about them.

The significance of the above portrait will become clear when we examine the implications. For one, mainstream people are likely to feel that they are equalizing a communication situation simply by making social adjustments, such as not showing the arrogance or condescension their social place would ordinarily entitle them to, without recognizing that once the social situation becomes equal, they also need to equalize the communication situation along cultural lines, for example, by <u>accepting</u> or adjusting to <u>confrontation</u> as a communication mode, instead of <u>avoiding</u> it. Secondly, the almost complete ignorance of mainstream people of the non-mainstream cultural system will necessitate an extensive "education" program, the beginnings of which have been attempted here. It will require on the mainstream person's part the adoption of an entirely different cultural set of perceptions and sensibilities, much as the non-mainstream person needs to reconcile what he already knows of the mainstream cultural system with mainstream perceptions and sensibilities to make sure that he, too, is accurately "reading" the other's intent. Thirdly, unaccustomed as mainstream people are to operating in more than one cultural system, getting them to operate effectively with another cultural mode will be extremely difficult; in this respect the background of mainstream people should be explored in order to determine whether there are vestiges of "ethnicity" operating within their family, which might allow for an extension of an already learned family mode of communication to a

different context. Fourthly, reciprocity in communication between mainstream and non-mainstream people will first require equalizing the power differential, then acquiring a modified bi-cultural communication mode. The means by which one equalizes a power differential on a personal level is to become person-oriented, thereby liberating oneself from notions of superiority based upon social position. This is especially irritating to non-mainstream minority people as they see themselves as the "colonized" in a discriminatory system "rigged" to give preferment to members of the group which make up the "colonizers"; which is to say that the social position that many whites hold is a result of being part of a system that has traditionally disallowed competition for that position by members of minority groups. On a social level, equalizing the power differential means supporting minority control of schools, and with it various expressions of cultural pluralism, including self-determination and the economic and political means to achieve it. That may mean for mainstream people not so much working <u>for</u> non-mainstream goals, but <u>against</u> the social forces that originate from their own society and culture and which work so destructively on the powerless members of our society.

<u>Motivation--Acknowledging and Reducing the "Risk" Factor</u>

The obvious motivation for learning about one's environment and the people in it is survival. We learn quickly whom we can rely upon, whom we cannot, who gives us sustenance, who is dangerous, and so forth. The element of risk in varying degrees very often determines what we learn and how quickly we learn it. I am using

the term "risk" broadly here to include not only potentially dangerous situations but those that are merely inconvenient and embarrassing. For example, going to a strange land entails a certain degree of risk. There is a different language, different customs, strange settings, different food, and so on. We prepare ourselves by first acknowledging and then attempting to reduce the risk factor. We learn beforehand something of the language, enough at least to ask where the bathroom is, of what foods to eat, what to buy, what the conventions are in the market place, something of the currency and exchange rate, etc. Should we expect a certain amount of distrust or even hostility we take precautions not to offend. If we prepare ourselves properly and well, learn to use the other's custom and language, we may be complimented by someone saying that we are not the "typical" American tourists, and so forth. In terms of personality, we recognize that being in a strange land, we are outsiders, dependent on others for protection, hospitality, and general good will. As "receivers" rather than "givers" we learn humility; as there is always a touch of arrogance in giving, so there is also always a touch of humility in receiving. Dependence on others makes us humble. Independence makes us arrogant.

Applying the above to contemporary American society we have failed to acknowledge that our access to various non-mainstream minority communities is based upon <u>their</u> hospitality and continued good will, that our success there in whatever capacity is based in large measure upon their cooperation. In other words, we have failed to acknowledge that there has been a risk or dependency

factor. That has made us rude, condescending, paternalistic, and, at times, arrogant. We have seen ourselves as the givers, not as receivers. What, after all, can we learn from the "uncivilized heathens?" We have taken our safety "for granted", again failing to respect our dependence on the various communities for protection. We often forget that police are called only <u>after</u> some "incident" has occurred. Will that next "incident" involve us?

The above paragraph is not intended to produce fear, but rather to promote dependence, so as to acknowledge and respect the opportunity the various communities offer us to make a living there. Yet it is obvious, too, that any white mainstream teacher in an inner-city school, for example, must be prepared to accept a certain amount of hostility, a hostility directed not necessarily at her personally, but at what she <u>represents</u>, as beneficiary of a rigged social system, yet a representation that only her person can contradict. Are you "ready" for that?